

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—Tuesday, April 27, 1999

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. HASTINGS of Washington).

### DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
April 27, 1999.

I hereby appoint the Honorable Doc HASTINGS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,  
*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

### MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 19, 1999, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

### E-RATE

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, my goal in Congress is for the Federal Government to be a better partner with States, local government, business, and private citizens in promoting livable communities. This means helping our citizens guarantee their families they are safe, economically secure, and healthy.

While we give much attention to the physical infrastructure in livability, roads, housing, transit, environmental protection, there is another fundamental building block of a livable community and that is a healthy education system.

The Federal Government has, throughout our history, been a key partner with the States and local communities in education. Some mistakenly suggest that there is no Federal role. Yet from the Northwest Ordinance of 1789, which set aside land in each of the new States for educational purposes, to the GI Bill following World War II, to the important legislation in the 1980s that expanded educational opportunities to the disabled,

the Federal Government has played an instrumental role in the development of American education.

One of the most important actions Congress has taken in the last 10 years to promote both the goal of quality education and connections to the broader world through the Internet is to be found in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This Act mandated that some of the billions of dollars in savings for the telecommunications industry be returned to our community in the form of reduced rates for Internet access.

Known as the E-Rate, short for educational rate, it is part of the Federal Universal Service Fund. It provides a 20 to 90 percent discount on telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections for public schools, both public and private, as well as our library systems.

One of the major battles in the last Congress was to protect the E-Rate. There were some justifiable concerns about the initial start-up, but these were turned into political issues that threatened the future of the discount itself.

Others tried to turn it for partisan advantage, attacking the Vice President in his work to develop the information superhighway, characterizing the E-Rate as a "Gore tax." While it was a clever laugh line, it ignored the fact that the Universal Service Fund has been an accepted part of the Federal communication landscape for over 60 years.

Adding the E-Rate to this mechanism simply brought it up to date, to the modern challenges faced by both rural and urban America. It was exciting to be a part of a coalition that included educational advocates, farsighted members of the industry, libraries across the country, and over 100 Members of Congress who put their names on the line as part of that effort.

Although scaled back somewhat, and with some important adjustments and reform, we were able to hold the system intact. There were over 25,000 applications approved who received \$1.66 billion.

Well, the word is in for this year. There are even more applications than last year, over 36,000 from around the country, more applications, and the total requests are over \$2.4 billion.

Even though we successfully resisted efforts to eliminate the E-Rate in the last Congress, and even though public opinion polls show overwhelming support for it, we must not be complacent.

Once again, there is legislation circulating in this session of Congress that would repeal the E-Rate and deny this essential program.

I am optimistic that we will prevail in protecting it. I am optimistic that this administration and this Congress will approve more money for school construction, and that we will do a better job being a partner to provide more teachers in our classrooms.

But it is essential, as we focus on education and livable communities, that we protect and enhance the capacity of every child in this country to gain computer skills and have access to the worldwide Internet connection.

### INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, 6 months ago today President Clinton signed the International Religious Freedom Act into law. The law mandates that within 120 days of enactment individuals shall be named to the Commission on International Religious Freedom created by the bill.

It has been 6 months since enactment of the bill, 2 months past the deadline, and the White House has still not named its three commissioners. Congress has done its part, but we are still waiting for the administration. When will the White House get serious about implementing this legislation?

In early February, the President spoke before a crowd of religious and political leaders from around the world at the National Prayer Breakfast. He praised the bill and he said he was proud to have signed it. But where is the implementation? Where is the enforcement? Where is the commitment?

The commission's first report on the condition of religious freedom around the world is due on May 1, this Saturday. Because the administration has wasted so much time in making the appointments, there is no way that the commission will meet that date, and it is unlikely that we will see a report this year. Another year wasted while people are being maimed, tortured, beaten, jailed and killed on account of their faith.

I believe it was the administration's intention to miss the May 1 deadline for the commission's report. This ensures this issue will not get a serious